



Frequently Asked Questions about Anthrax

What is anthrax?

Anthrax is a serious disease caused by *Bacillus anthracis*, a bacterium that forms spores. A bacterium is a very small organism made up of one cell. Many bacteria can cause disease. A spore is a cell that is dormant (asleep) but may come to life with the right conditions.

There are three types of anthrax:

- skin (cutaneous)
- digestive (gastrointestinal)
- lungs (inhalation).

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of anthrax are different depending on the type of the disease.

Cutaneous

The first symptom is a small sore that develops into a blister. The blister then develops into a skin ulcer with a black area in the center. The sore, blister and ulcer do not hurt.

Gastrointestinal

The first symptoms are nausea, loss of appetite, bloody diarrhea, and fever, followed by bad stomach pain.

Inhalation

The first symptoms of inhalation anthrax are like cold or flu symptoms and can include a sore throat, mild fever and muscle aches.

Later symptoms include cough, chest discomfort, shortness of breath, tiredness and muscle aches.

How soon do infected people get sick?

Symptoms can appear within 7 days of coming in contact with the spores for all three types of anthrax. For inhalation anthrax, symptoms can appear within a week or can take up to 42 days to appear.

Is anthrax contagious?

Anthrax is not known to spread from one person to another.

Humans can become infected with anthrax by handling products from infected animals or by breathing in anthrax spores from infected animal products like raw, untreated wool.

People also can become infected with gastrointestinal anthrax by eating undercooked meat from infected animals.

How is anthrax treated?

Antibiotics treat all three types of anthrax. Early identification and treatment are important. Success depends on the type of anthrax and how soon treatment begins.

Can anthrax be prevented?

There is a vaccine to prevent anthrax, but it is not currently available for the general public. In the event of an anthrax attack, healthcare providers will administer vaccine and antibiotics to people who may have been exposed to *B. anthracis*, but are not sick.

What should I do if I think I have anthrax?

If you are showing symptoms of anthrax infection, call your healthcare provider right away.

Can anthrax be used as a biological weapon?

Anthrax has already been used as a weapon. This happened in the United States in 2001 in New Jersey and elsewhere. Anthrax was deliberately spread through the postal system by sending letters with powder containing anthrax. This caused 22 cases of anthrax infection. Five cases occurred in New Jersey, with no deaths.

How dangerous is anthrax?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) classifies agents with recognized bioterrorism potential into three categories: A, B and C. Anthrax is a Category A agent. Category A agents

- pose the greatest possible threat to the public's health
- may spread across a large area
- require advance planning to protect the public's health.

In most cases, early treatment with antibiotics can cure cutaneous anthrax. Even if untreated, 80 percent of people who become infected with cutaneous anthrax do not die.

Gastrointestinal anthrax is more serious. Between 25 and 50 percent of cases result in death.

Inhalation anthrax is much more severe. In 2001, about half of the cases of inhalation anthrax ended in death.

What is New Jersey doing to prepare for a possible anthrax attack?

New Jersey is working with the CDC to prepare for an anthrax attack. Activities include:

- Developing plans and procedures to respond to an anthrax attack
- Training and equipping emergency response teams, gathering samples and performing tests to help state and local governments control infection
- Educating healthcare providers, the media, and the general public about what to do in the event of an attack
- Working closely with local health departments, veterinarians and laboratorians to watch for suspected cases of anthrax
- Working with hospitals, laboratories, emergency response teams, and healthcare providers to make sure they have the supplies they need in case of an attack.

Where can I get more information?

- Your healthcare provider
- Your local department of health
- The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services
 - Website – www.nj.gov/health
 - DHSS Communicable Disease Service at (609) 588-7500
- CDC
 - www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/anthrax
 - 1-800-CDC-INFO (4636) for assistance in English and Spanish – TTY 1-888-232-6348
 - E-mail: cdcinfo@cdc.gov